

June 7, 2019

As someone who volunteers with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and has lost someone I loved to suicide, I strongly support the adoption of a three-digit number that is dedicated only to individuals at risk of suicide. The number, either 611 or 988, should be linked to the existing Lifeline network/infrastructure and should receive full funding for its implementation, a public awareness campaign, and the anticipated increase in call volume.

Many Lifeline callers are in a fragile, distressed state and call the line with more than a little trepidation. They don't know what to expect. They're scared, lonely, and often feeling at the end of their rope. People in this emotional state should **not** have to call the existing 211 number and wade through endless phone menus before they can reach someone to talk to. (By which point, more than a few callers will have probably given up and hung up.) And when these folks do reach someone to talk to, that person must have specific, accredited training in suicide risk assessment, safety planning, and prevention.

The 211 number provides a valuable service in linking people with local services for food, shelter, etc., but connecting callers with these resources is very different than working with distressed callers and their psychological needs. With over 45,000 deaths each year in this country to suicide, it's a public health crisis. We need to make it as easy as possible for people contemplating suicide to call a three-digit number dedicated to suicide prevention and get connected with a trained Lifeline counselor. We need to adopt 611 or 988.

-Jennifer Gimblin